

9th International Strategic Management Conference

The Relationship between Employee Silence and Organizational Commitment in a Private Healthcare Company

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Abstract

There is an increasing awareness about the silence in organizations and literature about the relation between commitment and employee silence has not consistent findings. In addition to these; affective commitment is supported as the most important commitment behaviour that affects the performance of employees. Because of these literature feedbacks this study aimed to research the relationship between employee silence and affective commitment. This study adds to the body of knowledge about the relationship between the concepts and in the light of related hypothesis, significant and negative relationship between affective commitment and one of employee silence dimension (defensive silence) has been supported by empirical analysis.

Keywords: Organizational silence, employee silence, organizational commitment, affective commitment

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the International Strategic Management Conference.

1. Introduction

As modern organizational environments become more diverse, the environment and communication processes within them also become more complex and interactive. As a result, employees have been identified as a rich source of feedback to address and solve work problems and issues (Detert and Burris 2007; Cakici, 2008; Morrison and Milliken, 2000). Despite this, research has indicated that employees often feel a sense of insecurity when asked by management to express opinions and ideas as they believe that comments and recommendation for change may upset the current balance and organization or upset administrators. It is this feeling of insecurity by employees which results in the subconscious or conscious decision by an employee to remain silent.

It has also been found that an employee's commitment to the organization can produce both positive and negative effects on the choice of an employee to speak their mind or remain silent depending on the situation and particular type of commitment.

Many academics have discussed the effects of employee silence and the effects of organizational commitment for an organization's success separately and together to understand the relationship (Gao, Janssen and Shi, 2011; Colquitt, Scott, and LePine, 2007; Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, 1995; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). Much research has been conducted and many questions have been asked for both subjects but still there are some

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unanswered questions. For that reason, to better acknowledge the relationship between the effects of employee silence on organizational commitment, we asked a specific research question in the survey:

Research Question: Is there a relationship between employee silence and organizational commitment?

To answer this question, we analyzed the relevant literature, developed a model and used statistical techniques to test the relationships among the variables of employee silence, organizational commitment and the effects of employee silence on organizational commitment.

2. Literature Review And Hypotheses

2.1. Organizational Silence:

Morrison and Milliken (2000) explain “organizational silence” as the hard choice made by employees within some organizations to keep their thoughts and opinions quiet and shut themselves away from company decisions. Silence doesn’t only mean people’s silence, but also includes not writing, not being present, negative attitude, not being heard and being ignored. Silence within organizations refers to “quieting, censorship, suppression, marginalization, trivialization, exclusion, ghettoization and other forms of discounting” (Hazen, 2006) and blocks the communication channels which helps employee motivation (Vakola and Boudaras, 2005)

Morrison and Milliken’s concept of organizational silence blocks organizations from hearing their members’ voices. Many scholars have conducted research on this subject (Argyris, 1977; Redding, 1985; Ewing, 1977; Nemeth, 1997). It is perplexing that Morrison and Milliken (2000) point out that organizational silence is the common choice made by organization members despite all research extolling the virtues of upward information for organizational health. (Rodriguez 2004; Argyris & Schon, 1978; Deming, 1986; Glauser, 1984). Ironically organizational silence can remain prevalent when management proudly speak of empowerment and the development of more open lines communication (Lawler 1992; Pfeffer, 1994; Spreitzer 1995). Although definitions vary, there is agreement that employee silence involves the intentional withholding of questions, ideas, concerns, information or opinions by employees concerning issues relating to their job and organization (Briensfield, 2009; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2005).

Essentially, organizational silence is an inefficient process which can negatively impact all facets of an organization. Organizational silence can manifest itself in various forms, such as collective silence in meetings, low level participation in suggestion schemes and low levels of collective voice (Maria, 2006). According to Morrison and Milliken (2000) organizational silence occurs due to the fundamental beliefs held by managers including; manager’s fear of negative feedback and a set of implicit beliefs held by managers that lead to organizational structures, processes and managerial practices that impede the level of silence within an organization (Rodriguez, 2004). Ghoshal and Moran (1996) discussed the belief that employees are self-interested and untrustworthy. This model views, employees as effort adverse and not to be trusted to act in the best interest of the organization without some form of incentive or sanction. Another belief that leads to organization silence is the view that only management understands how best to deal with most issues of organizational importance. Ewing (1977) points this belief out as a common ideology within most organizations, and Glauser (1984) points out the popularity of the belief that managers must direct and control while subordinates simply obey. Argyris (1977, 1991) similarly explains that most managers believe they must be in total control.

Some academics have tried to explain the reasons for organizational silence with internal and external realities of the companies such as administrative, personal and organizational factors (Milliken et al., 2003; Premeaux, 2001, Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Eroglu et al., 2011). According to Cakici (2007, 2010), organizational silence is related to the cultural norms because it is almost impossible to change the code of norms in employees’ subconscious.

The most common factors causing organizational silence are; the culture of inconsistent treatment of employees, climate of silence, organizational culture, administrative issues, negative feedback by management, prejudice, personal characters of managers, lack of trust, risk of talking, risk of isolation, bad experiences in the past, fear of damaging

relationships, characteristic differences, cultural issues, values and norms and fear of management power (Cakici 2007, 2008, 2010; Milliken et al., 2003; Premeaux 2001; Pinder and Harlos, 2001; Bowen and Blackmon, 2003, Demir and Ozturk, 2010; Bildik, 2009; Eroglu et al., 2011).

2.2 *Employee Silence*

Employees' silence can be very dangerous for an organization. Employee silence leads to a lack of concern among employees. Unconcerned employees may ignore their organizations values and this can cause a lack of quality in their business (Joinson, 1996). This attitude always carries a heavy price for both employees and organizations.

Employee silence is described as “the withholding of any form of genuine expression about the individuals behavioural, cognitive and / or affective evaluations of his / her organizational circumstance to persons who are perceived to be capable of effecting change or redress” (Pinder and Harlos, 2001). Employee silence differs from organizational silence in that the latter is mainly occurs at an organizational level whereas the former occurs mainly at an individual level (Pinder and Harlos, 2001). Employee silence can often be the result of an employee's belief that they have been the victim of injustice.

In the past twelve years much research has been done on the concept of employee silence with the result that it is now recognized that employee silence can occur in response to a wide variety of situations. Van Dyne et al.(2003) and Greenberg and colleagues (2007) described the possibility that employee silence can occur as a result of apathy or malicious intent. Whilst attempts have been made to investigate employee silence empirically none of the assessment tools have actually addressed the current concept of employee silence (Brinsfield, 2009).

Academics have described employee silence in four different forms based on employee behaviours; acquiescent silence, defensive silence, prosocial silence and protective silence. (e.g. Pinder and Harlos 2001; Van Dyne, 2003; Brinsfield 2009; Cakici 2010; Perlow and Repening; 2009, Alparslan 2010)

2.2.1 *Acquiescent Silence*

In this case the concept of silence relates to occasions where employees chose not to express relevant ideas, information and opinions based on resignation which suggests disengaged behaviour (Kahn 1990). Hirschman (1970) views neglect as a kind of passive behaviour demonstrated by low levels of involvement. Farrell (1983) describes silences as a key factor of neglect and inaction. Pinder and Harlos (2001) explain “silence as the opposite of voice in form inaction that is often interpreted as endorsement or passive acceptance of the status quo.” Thus acquiescent silence is synonymous with employees who are essentially disengaged and are unwilling to take steps to enact change.

2.2.2 *Defensive Silence*

Defensive silence is based on an employee's personal fear of speaking up. This can be termed as “Quiescent Silence” (Pinder and Harlos, 2001). Morrison and Milliken (2000) discussed organizational silence as being a main result of fear. “It is also consistent with psychological safety (Edmonson, 1999) and voice opportunity, (Avery and Quinones, 2002) as critical preconditions for speaking up in work contexts. Van Dyne (2003) describes defensive silence as “withholding relevant ideas, information or opinions as a form of self-protection, based on fear”. Defensive silence differs from the previous form in that defensive silence involves the individual weighing up the alternatives and making a conscious choice to withhold ideas information and opinions as the safest option for the individual at that point in time.

2.2.3 *ProSocial Silence*

Van Dyne et al. (2003) explains ProSocial silence as withholding work related ideas information or opinions with the goal of benefiting other people or the organization. Korsgaard et al. (1997) describes ProSocial silence as intentional and proactive behaviour that is primarily focused on others. ProSocial silence involves conscious decision making by an employee, ProSocial Silence arises from a concern for others instead of fear of negative personal

consequences. Podkasoff et al. (2000) describes prosocial silence as the refusal to express ideas information or opinions so that others in the organization might benefit from it. This silence is motivated by the desire to help others and share the duties. It is considerate and focuses on others.

2.2.4 Protective Silence

Morrison and Milliken (2003) explain that maintaining a good relationship between the organization and employees is one of the most important causes of silence. Employees mostly prefer to be silent instead of telling what is wrong in their organizations thinking others may not agree with them. For that reason silent employees never share their opinion to solve conflict in the organization. Another form of protective silence is where employees can be silent and accepting about decisions of higher level management to avoid causing any problem in their organization because they believe that to share their thoughts may compromise the success of the organization. It is not an only image problem, it is also a problem related to maintaining their good relationships within the organization. (Perlow and Repenning, 2009, Alparslan 2010)

2.3 Organizational Commitment

Interest from organizational experts and administration in the commitment of individuals to organizational or team goals have escalated in recent times. To date whilst there has been no general agreement on what this means there is considerable overlap of ideas or theories. Organizational commitment describes the attitude and behaviour of an employee towards an organization goal. Organizational commitment explains employees' psychological and emotional attachment to their workplaces (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer, Allen & Smith, 1993). This sort of behaviour indicates that some employees identify themselves with their organizations (Steers, 1977). It is also an attitude or tendency of connection between individuals and their organization (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982). Organizational commitment can also be described as "a force that binds an individual to a course of action that is of relevance to a particular goal" (Shahnawaz and Juyal, 2006). Organizational commitment can also be summed up as "... the totality of normative pressures to act in a way which means organizational goals and interests" (Weiner, 1982). Organizational commitment is considered to be the emotional, rational and moral commitment of an employee to the goals and ideals of the organization to which the employee belongs.

Organizational commitment occurs for a variety of reasons based on the employee's beliefs about the organization and its goals. Although organizational commitment can take three main forms these are based on the employees understanding and belief in the goals of the organization and benefits an employee will gain by remaining with the organization. We believe that organizational commitment can be enhanced or obstructed by management.

Meyer & Allen's model (1997) suggests a three – tiered approach to organizational commitment and takes into account the bond that occurs between an employee and employer as (Salim, Kamarudin & Abdul Kadir, 2008).

2.3.1 Affective Commitment

Affective commitment is the emotional attachment of an employee to, identification with and involvement in the organization (Meyer et al, 1993; Shore and Tetrick, 1991; Romzek, 1990). This can be demonstrated by a sharing of the values, a desire to maintain membership and working without any expectations for the benefit of the organization. In consequence of the affective commitment, employees want to maintain their membership in the organization (Dawley et al., 2005). Affective commitment alludes to a sense of belonging and attachment to an organization and has been affiliated with personal characteristics organizational structures and experiences in the workplace including pay, supervision, clarity of the job description and skill variety (Hartmann, 2000)

2.3.2 Continuance Commitment

Continuance commitment is based on the employee's perceived cost of leaving the organization or on a perceived lack of alternative employment opportunities. (Buitendach and De Witte, 2005; Reichers, 1985; Murray, Gregoire and Downey, 1991). Continuance commitment describes employee's evaluation of whether the cost of leaving the organization outweighs the cost of staying. Those who believe the cost of leaving the organization is greater than the

cost of staying remain because they need to (Abdulkadir, Isiaka & Adedoyin, 2012). This means that employees stay in an organization for fear of losing benefits, pay or unemployment (Murray et al., 1991).

2.3.3 Normative Commitment

Normative commitment deals with an employee's feeling of obligation to stay with the organization (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Wiener and Geichmen, 1977; Roussenu 1995). As discussed by Meyer and Allen (1991), the employee stays with an organization out of a perceived obligation to the company which may arise from a variety of causes. These can include employees who have received large amounts of training and feel obligated to "repay the debt". These feelings of loyalty to one's organization can also arise from one's upbringing or other socialisation processes. These findings in the literature show that organizational commitment is important for the employee to maintain effective performance in the workplace.

2.4 Relationship between Employee Silence and Organizational Commitment

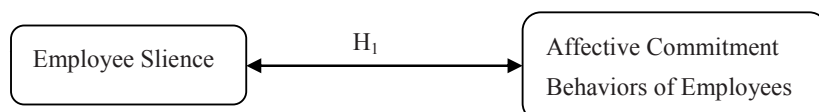
Although commitment has been defined in many ways, Meyer and Maltin (2010) view commitment as "a force that binds an individual to a target (social or non-social) and to a course of action of relevance to that target" (Meyer, Becker and Van Dick, 2006). As previously mentioned, commitment can manifest itself in different ways which are termed affective, normative and continuance commitment.

Researchers have indicated positive and negative relations between affective commitment to the organization and employee well-being (Meyer and Maltin, 2010) such as overall physical well-being (e.g., Siu, 2002), general health (e.g., Bridger, Kilminster and Slaven, 2007; Mor, Barak, Levin, Nissly and Lane, 2006), mental health (e.g., Grawitch, Trares and Kohler, 2007; Probst, 2003), positive affect (e.g., Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren and de Chermont, 2003), job-related well-being (e.g., Epitropaki and Martin, 2005), self-esteem (e.g., Frone, 2007), and life satisfaction (e.g., Lu, Siu, Spector, and Shi, 2009; Zickar, Gibby, and Jenny, 2004) and negative relations have consistently been found with measures of strain, including psychosomatic symptoms (e.g., Addae and Wang, 2006; Richardson, Burke, and Martinussen, 2006), physical health complaints (e.g., Probst, 2003; Wegge, van Dick, Fisher, West, and Dawson, 2006), mental health complaints such as anxiety and depression (e.g., Epitropaki and Martin, 2005; Tucker, Sinclair, and Thomas, 2005), negative affect (e.g., Thoresen et al., 2003), burnout (e.g., Grawitch et al., 2007; Hakanen, Bakker, and Schaufeli, 2006), and felt stress, distress, general strain, and job-related tension (e.g., Daigle, 2007; Lambert, Hogan and Griffin, 2008).

Organizational commitment can be referred to as a "double-edged" sword (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). "Although high commitment can result in active coping in some situations, inversely it can also result in an employee being particularly vulnerable to psychological stress in that area of commitment (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984)". Hence organizational commitment can have both positive and negative effects on organizational silence depending upon the particular commitment of the employee. Studies have found a correlation between organizational silence and employee commitment. It has also been found that the relationship between organizational commitment and silence can vary greatly between groups within an organization. These groups remain silent for different reasons which depend on the situation of the employee group. It is believed that by reducing factors which lead to organizational silence for example by instituting an open culture both within and outside the organization as well as important changes in the structure of the organization and management styles, can lead to the elimination of silence behaviour within employee groups. This in turn makes employees feel more secure within the organization and hence improves effective commitment of employees to the organization. (Dimitras and Vakola, 2003; Amah O. and Okafor C., 2008; Nikmaram S., Yamchi H., Samereh S., Zahrani M. and Alvani M., 2012)

H1: There is a relationship between employee silence and affective commitment behaviors of employees

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



3. Methodology

3.1. Data Collection and Demographic Distribution of the Sample

In this study, we gathered data from a private hospital in Istanbul. This hospital is extremely popular among locals with a very large clientele. This hospital is situated in a working class, industrial area of the city and is fed by surrounding areas. Questionnaires were presented and completed in hard copy form. In total 175 surveys were completed and the results used to inform our hypothesis.

The participants in this survey included a wide range of age groups (52% of those surveyed were aged between 20-25 years old, 29,1% were aged 26-30 years, 11,4% were aged 31-35 years, 4,6% were aged 36-40 years of age and 2,9% were aged 41 years and over. Of the participants in the survey 75,4% were female and 24,6% were male. Marital status indicated 73,1% of the participants were single and 26,9% were married. In the survey participants were asked to indicate their level of education. 0,6% indicated having completed only a primary education, 41,7% of those surveyed indicated having completed high school, 29,1% of participants had completed college, 25,1% of those surveyed had completed graduate level with 3,4% having completed a master degree. The survey also recorded levels of work experience among participants. The study found that 72,6% of respondents had been working 0-2 years, 15,4% had been working 3-5 years, 6,9% had been working 6-8 years, with 5,9% working more than 8 years. Respondents indicated time spend working within this particular organization. It was found that 17,7% had been working there up to 1 year, 24% had worked within the organization from 1-2 years 16,6% have worked there 2-3 years, 41,1% had worked there 4-5 years and 0,6% indicated having worked for the organization for 5 years or longer.

3.2. Measures

Demographic questions have been prepared by the researchers. The first 8 questions relate to “affective commitment and the remaining questions (29 questions) deal with employee silence.

As an affective commitment scale, we used the scale improved by Wasti (2000) utilizing a five-point Likert type based on the three dimensional model of Allen and Meyer (1991).

To measure organizational silence we used the scale utilized by Alparslan (2010) and Dyne et al. (2003) for their research and taken from Briensfield’s (2009) PhD Thesis. This scale includes 9 questions about “Acquiescent Silence”, 9 questions about “Defensive Silence” and 5 questions about “ProSocial Silence” and the rest 6 questions are about “Protective Silence”.

4. Data Analysis and Hypotheses Test Results

4.1. Factor Analysis

Factor analysis with principal component by varimax rotation, performed to find out the factor structure, is conducted and all dependent and independent variables were analyzed concurrent. According to KMO (=0,822) and significance value (p=0.00) our sample is suitable for the hypothesis testing. Affective commitment scale is composed of one dimension as expected and employee silence scale is composed of four dimensions as its original form and in this study original names are used for subscales. Item loadings, dimensions and variance values are in the following.

Table 1: Factor Loadings of Affective Commitment and Employee Silence Scales

Total Var. 59,048	Component				
	F1 var. : 18,022 Defensive Silence	F2 var. : 12,708 Affective Commitment	F3 var. :10,628 Acquiescent Silence	F4 var. : 10,305 Protective Silence	F5 var. : 7,385 ProSocial Silence
DS 22	,770				
DS 23	,762				
DS 21	,762				
DS 20	,742				
DS 19	,742				
DS 25	,664				
DS 27	,639				
AC 3		,770			
AC 2		,737			
AC 4		,695			
AC 8		,650			
AC 1		,648			

AC 5	,578			
AC 6	,566			
AqS16		,832		
AqS 15		,784		
AqS 14		,683		
AqS 12		,664		
PtS 37			,812	
PtS 34			,725	
PtS 36			,717	
PtS 35			,604	
PsS 32				,731
PsS 31				,675
PsS 28				,544

DS: Defensive Silence, AC: Affective Commitment, AqS: Acquiescent Silence, PsS: ProSocial Silence, PtS: Protective Silence

4.2. Correlation Analysis

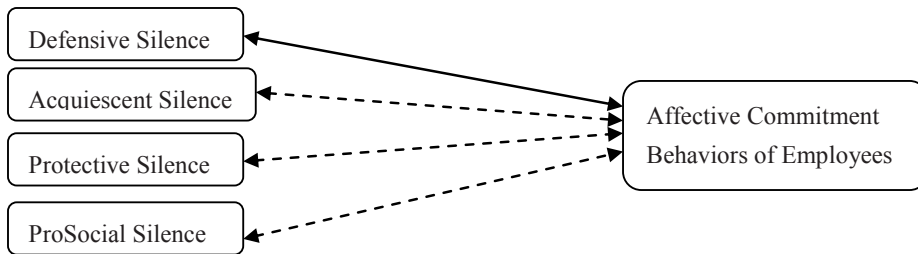
We calculated means and standard deviations for each variable and created a correlation matrix of all variables used in hypothesis testing. Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations among all dimensions used in the analyses are shown in Table 2. There is a significant and negative correlation between affective commitment and defensive silence dimension of employee silence and as expected all silence dimensions have medium correlation between each other. So our hypothesis is supported and it can be said that there is a significant and negative correlation between employee silence and affective commitment.

Table 2: Correlation- Mean - Standard Deviation Coefficients

	S.D	MEAN	1	2	3	4	5
1.AC	,59401	1,9412	(0,801)				
2.DS	,87844	3,9843	-0,137(*)	(0,793)			
3.AqS	,83015	3,9878	-0,070	0,437 (**)	(0,879)		
4.Pts	,86251	3,8552	-0,041	0,345 (**)	0,435 (**)	(0,619)	
5.PsS	,94213	3,5843	,011	0,376 (**)	0,486 (**)	0,491 (**)	(0,818)

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 2. Final Model



“_” refers to significant relationship; “...”to non refers -significant relationship

5. Conclusion

The main objective of this paper is to research the relationship between employee silence and affective commitment. Although there is an increasing awareness about silence in organizations, there have not been consistent findings relating it to commitment.

In this paper we examined affective commitment because affective commitment makes employees feel they are a vital part of their organization, accept the main aims and values, work happily and are proud of their organization.

This type of commitment directly effects employee performance within the organisation. For that reason affective commitment is the most effective type of commitment and the form most valued by organizations.

As a conclusion the results of this research show us there is a negative and significant relationship between defensive employee silence and organizational commitment mentioned in the literature review (e.g., Daigle, 2007; Lambert, Hogan and Griffin, 2008). Due to this result we can say our hypothesis has been proven. In our research any relationship of the other silence forms could not be found. We believe that this must be related to the chosen organization's employee behaviours and organizational structure. This subject can be searched in future researches.

6. Implication and Limitations

The findings of the study should contribute to managers and practitioners becoming more aware of employee silence. In addition management should encourage employees to express their relevant ideas, information and opinions.

The main and most important limitation of this study is that data was gathered from one private hospital in Istanbul. Therefore the findings of this study need to be evaluated with this in mind. The survey answers are related to the perception of employees at that moment. Future studies might research different firms or more than one sector or type of industry. We look forward to the results of future studies.

Marmara University, Scientific Research Commission project number "SOS-D-150513-0206

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